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‘Watch your tenants’ utility bills closely’

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PETALING JAYA: Revising current laws and introducing a better monitoring system on tenants is a must to curb electricity thefts especially those caused by illegal crypto mining, experts say.

There should be a rental database on tenants, said criminologist Datuk Dr P. Sundramoorthy of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

“If a tenant frequently has high utility bills, or if there are reports of electrical theft or meter tampering, he could be flagged in the system for further scrutiny.

“This could help landlords, law enforcement authorities and utility companies prevent illegal mining operations before they become widespread,” he said when contacted .

There have been cases of property owners crying foul after they ended up with huge bills when their tenants secretly conducted illegal crypto mining operations, which consumed a lot of electricity.

Sundramoorthy said the government should look into amending the Electricity Supply Act to ensure joint responsibility between homeowners and tenants on matters related to electricity consumption.

“By making both parties accountable, it would force tenants to think twice before engaging in illegal activities,” he said.

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Legal experts push for more protection for landlords

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Bukit Aman Criminal Investigation Department (CID) director Datuk Seri Comm Mohd Shuhailly Mohd Zain spoke of a need for a comprehensive approach.

Besides closer multi-agency cooperation to ensure a more coordinated response – from intelligence sharing and inspections to prosecution – he said:

“There should be stricter requirements for building rental oversight, where landlords must verify the background of tenants and their intended business before leasing out commercial or industrial spaces.”

Additionally, implementing mandatory energy audits on high-consumption commercial lots could help flag abnormal

electricity usage early, he said.

“Moreover, there must be heavier penalties for repeat offenders. Not just fines, but possibly asset seizures or criminal charges where applicable to serve as a stronger deterrent.”

He emphasised the importance of public education, too.

“Communities need to understand that electricity theft is not a victimless crime. It leads to higher tariffs for honest consumers, strains the national grid, and poses serious fire and safety hazards to surrounding areas,” he said.

Lawyer Alvin Tan Keng Yi said that while no specific protections exist under the law for property owners, several steps may be taken to prevent illegal cryptocurrency mining or electricity theft.

This would include provisions in tenancy agreements to require the tenant to register an account with Tenaga Nasional Berhad before the tenancy begins, he said.

For example, he said this should specify that the premises must be solely used for residential purposes and that illegal activities are prohibited.

“Before entering into a tenancy agreement, the owners should conduct due diligence. For example, the owner may verify the identity of the tenant by requesting a copy of his identification card, or asking for a pay slip or utility bills to verify personal information.

“For foreign tenants, the owner may request for their employment letter for verification purposes,” he said.

Tan said the landlord may initiate a civil action against the tenant for any breach of the tenancy agreement in cases of illegal activities on the premises.

Senior lawyer Datuk Joy Wilson Appukuttan said there is no legislation that specifically govern landlords and tenants but these parties could determine their rights under their tenancy agreement and general law.

“Any breaches of the tenancy agreement entails the parties to resort to court action for relief and remedies.”

He said a comprehensive landlord-tenant law is crucial which includes the setting up of tribunal that will provide immediate relief for landlords to act against errant tenants.

Malaysians Against Rape, Assault and Snatch Thief (Marah)

founder Dave Avran concurred, saying that revising current legislation is the way to go.

“It could lead to improved enforcement, empowering the government to tackle the issue effectively.”

However, he cautioned that it would not suffice to just revise the law.

“There must be an improvement in the monitoring systems to identify unusual increases in electricity usage,” he said.

He called for proper and thorough screenings of potential tenants.

“This is to prevent the property being rented by unscrupulous people.”

“Educating landlords and tenants about the dangers and legal repercussions of illicit crypto mining is also essential,” he said.